

- Minutes -

PUBLIC INPUT

For Rifle River Recreation Area -
General Management Plan

(Notes taken by Daniel Lord ...edit by Paul N. Curtis)

On September 15, 2004, a public information and input meeting was held at the Rose Township Hall in Lupton, MI. The purpose of the meeting was to share information with attendees on the Management Planning process in general and its application for Rifle River RA specifically. A key element of that planning process is to gather public input on what the park users feel are important considerations for natural and historic/cultural resource values, education and recreation opportunities, management focus, visitor experience and development needs.

The meeting was moderated by Paul N. Curtis, Management Plan Administrator for DNR-Parks and Recreation Bureau (PRB), with assistance from PRB and Department staff. Public attendance at the meeting was counted at seven (7).

Following is an overview of the meeting content and public input:

GENERAL: (PowerPoint presentation)

- Introduction and planning process overview – discussion of where we're at and where we're going.
- Importance of filling out 'Comment Form'.
- Purpose of meeting – to describe the process and most importantly, to gather public input.
- Why is the DNR is doing this?
 - More efficient and effective management of our park system.
 - Establish Purpose & Significance for each park, an Identity.
 - Establish Management Zones to guide future planning and management decisions.
- Description of the informational tools that the DNR utilizes in this planning process (GIS) and the input gained from other DNR program staff.
- Zone descriptions & examples of them
- "Draft" Purpose & Significance Statements for public review and comment – DNR is looking to incorporate the public stakeholders voice or opinion into the Management Plan
- The move of the RRRA to Parks Division in 1963 signaled that the Department recognized the value of the recreation area for all types of recreation, not just hunting and fishing.
- Highlights of RRRA include:

- the headwaters of the Rifle River are found in the recreation area.
- the Rifle River is a designated Natural River.
- there are seven miles of trout streams, seven lakes and three ponds.
- the park has 4,449 acres, of which 4,000 acres are open for hunting.
- an ecologically-sensitive northern fen exists and the recreation area has been used for eagle and red-shoulder hawk nesting.
- remnants remain of early homesteads and the impact of the Jewett family and Grousehaven.
- Overview of natural and historic/cultural resources, and recreational and educational opportunities that occur at RRRA
- Review of Draft Zone Map that was developed. Looking for input from the meeting stakeholders.
- Internet posting on website for 30 days to solicit additional comments @ www.michigan.gov/parkmanagementplans

PUBLIC QUESTIONS / COMMENTS: (Public question/comment and *DNR Response (in Italics), if one was given. The “Comment Form” was used to guide input.*)

- Natural Resource Values and Comments:
 - The ‘natural’ setting of the recreation area is unique and helps make RRRA a special place.
 - Enjoy experiencing nature.
 - The water features in the park are important for fishing, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, etc.
 - The trails are important for exercise and observation/appreciation of the natural setting(s)
 - Black panther and cougar have been sighted near the park. It is likely that the park provides a corridor for movement. Is the DNR aware of this? – *No*
 - Has there been any impact on the deer population from these? – *No one (Wildlife Division or Parks and Recreation) is aware of any impacts*
 - The natural areas and ecologically-sensitive areas, specifically the northern fen (Pintail Pond), how are these protected? – *Specific measures are not yet developed, other than the fact that the zoning will pre-empt non-compatible management/planning decisions. Zones do not have any legal basis at this point, and therefore cannot be “legally” enforced. At Pintail Pond, we have a dilemma whereby we want to protect this highly sensitive fen and at the same time, use it as an important resource for education. We think it is possible to do both.*
- Historical/Cultural Resource Values and Comments:
 - Important to retain/preserve historic/cultural remnants in park.
 - Question on property expansion. The area south of the park, near State Forest land, has Native American artifacts. Can this area be

incorporated into the park for protection of these sensitive historic/cultural sites? – *Our boundaries do not incorporate this area, and it is likely within and/or south of the Au Sable State Forest. We will notify Forest, Minerals and Fire Management (FMFM) of this concern.*

- Recreation Opportunity Comments:

- Trails and roads used for general enjoyment and appreciation of the recreation area. Trails are important.
- Hunting is popular in the recreation area. How do hunters know where they can hunt? – *Hunting areas are signed. One area of concern raised by our Conservation Officer is the Safety Zone around the rustic cabins. When a hunter is coming through the woods, it can be easy to miss a sign or otherwise inadvertently enter this zone.*
- There is a lack of snowmobile trails to access other trails near the park. Wouldn't want to lose ability to traverse through the park. *Currently roads within the park are open for snowmobile use, as are frozen lakes in the winter.*
- There is an opportunity for expanded winter use in the park. For instance, the park could run a concession for cross-country ski rental.
- Local business and the ORV Association are actively working on trail connections to ORV areas to the north. Could there be an ORV Campground in the park at the north end? – *We would not allow ORV use in the recreation area, but there is nothing to prevent an ORV user from camping in our campgrounds and recreating elsewhere. ORV users are doing this now.*
- Are the campgrounds big enough? – *Yes, the existing capacities in our modern, rustic and organizational campgrounds, as well as our cabins, comfortably meet our needs and are not likely to change.*
- Keep 'developed' recreation to the north end of the park. Wouldn't want to see it impact the natural qualities of the majority of the park.
- Is the infrastructure in the rustic areas going to be expanded? – *No, we do not see that need at this time.*

- Education/Interpretation Opportunity Comments:

- Fragile areas such as Pintail Pond could be signed to not only educate, but also protect (stay on trail)
- Provide more tree and wildflower identification.
- Provide more interpretive/educational information on the Jewett family and Grousehaven. *A lot can be done to enhance this element.*
- Need more information on the emerald ash borer and firewood.
- Opportunity to strengthen the existing self-guided road tour to highlight park features.

- 'DRAFT' Purpose & Significance Statements:

- The statements sound reasonable.

- 'DRAFT' Management Zone Map:
 - Would like to see a 'no cut zone' (timber) for preservation and protection of more sensitive areas. Move the 'Backcountry Zone' near Lost Lake further north to form a 'no cut' buffer.
 - *Comment made to group that the planning process requires that the plan will be reviewed at least every five years by the Planning Team. The plan will be active, not static.*
- Thoughts on Management Focus:
 - *Broad range comments from camper 'report cards' has been taken into consideration.*
 - *Are we providing enough camping for the size of the area? – Based on current use of the facilities in place, and the use of the area, we feel no need for expansion.*
- Visitor experience:
 - Don't change the park
 - Beautiful experience
 - Focus on non-development
- Development Issues:
 - *None cited*
- Other comments:
 - Suggestion that a follow-up article in the local paper could direct people who did not attend to the web site for comment.
 - Finances. The state is holding off on payment of taxes to the county (Payment in Lieu of Taxes – PILT). This should be addressed in the Management Plan. *This is not a Management Plan issue, and is being addressed by the Legislature and Governor's Office. It is our understanding that they have come to some kind of resolution.*
 - *There was general concurrence and endorsement of the planning process and outcomes for the Rifle River RA.*